



Trinity College

HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

March 6, 2013

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing with regard to Bill HB 6581 that addresses juveniles with very long sentences having their cases looked at again, at another interval, a second time, and Bill SB 1062 that eliminates mandatory life-without-parole sentences for those under 18 by removing them from coverage under the capital felony/murder-with-special-circumstances statute. I am totally in support of both of these bills.

I have been a Professor of Theater and Dance at Trinity College for 42 years and Founder and Executive/Artistic Director of the Judy Dworin Performance Project for 24 years. I have been leading education and arts intervention programs at York CI for the past eight years. Several of the women that I work with in the arts engagement workshops that I lead were sentenced at a very young age and have been at York for many years already. The women that they are presently represents a significant evolution from the time they committed the crimes for which they are now serving time. I see such growth and, not to overstate it, transformation occurs in these young women. They are seeking whatever avenues available to improve themselves—taking advantage of the arts and educational offerings and making tremendous progress. They are smart, talented, and show such great potential. And yet some of them face 10, 20 and even 30 more years of prison time.

It seems to be not only prudent, but also critical to re-examine the cases of these women (and men) who received these enormous sentences sometimes when they were as young as 14 years old, at an interval that might allow a reconsideration of their status. Perhaps on a re-examination, the benefits of the extensive sentences that they face might be seen in a different light. And perhaps not. But at least there would be an opportunity to assess this before a person jailed at age 14 or 15 has lived 50 years behind bars.

And mandatory sentences of life-without-parole for those under 18 ignores the fact that mistakes made in adolescence must be viewed with a different lens than those of an adult who has had many more years of development, maturation, and experience. Bill SB 1062 reinforces this further by providing youth-related criteria for adult courts to consider when sentencing children convicted of felonies—another much needed improvement of the present system.

Before I began my work at York, I might not have had this opinion. I, like so many, did not give those in prison much thought. But my work at York has afforded me the kind of insight that I wish were available to more of us. The people that reside at York are human beings, subject to

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grave errors and also subject to great change. The choices of a youth, many who have led battered lives exposed to the streets, sexual and physical abuse, drug addicted parents and family members, and more, can be wrong-headed and damaging, but whether the punishments that have been assigned are appropriate is another matter. I urge those in a position to decide to allow these bills and the sound and humane opportunities they afford youthful offenders to pass — offering the possibility of much fairer treatment under the law.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Judy Dworin". The signature is fluid and elegant, with the first name "Judy" and last name "Dworin" clearly distinguishable.

Judy Dworin

Executive/Artistic Director, Judy Dworin Performance Project
Professor, Theater and Dance, Trinity College